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Review of *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* by Moya Bailey (New York University Press)

by Yiming Wang | Book Reviews, Issue 13.2 (Fall 2024)

ABSTRACT *Misogynoir Transformed* is a pioneering work by Moya Bailey that offers a groundbreaking analysis of misogynoir and the transformative strategies for social change in contemporary digital society. Through careful analysis of media representations, web series, and social media platforms, Bailey reveals how Black women and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant folks encounter and resist damaging narratives. Bailey also introduces the conceptual framework of digital alchemy to conceptualize the praxis that Black women employ to transform harmful everyday media into valuable social justice media, which functions to reduce the negative effects of misogynoir and create their own safe and inclusive community. This transformative activity highlights the dual effects of visibility—it is empowering but also precarious. Bailey's work is evidence of how digital platforms have the positive power to reduce misogynoir and reshape the discourse on gender diversity and social justice.

KEYWORDS Black studies, digital media, misogynoir, queer studies, resistance

Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance. By Moya Bailey. NY: New York University Press, 2021. 242 pp. (paperback) ISBN: 978-1-4798-7874-1. US List: $16.95.

Moya Bailey's *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* presents a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis that compellingly explores the intricate forces shaping misogynoir today, alongside the digital resistance

strategies employed by Black women to enact transformative change. Bailey employs an array of methodological tools, including close reading, interviews, and digital humanities techniques. With this mixed-method approach, Bailey explores the dynamic utilization of social media by Black women to counter misogynoir and cultivate their roles as "digital alchemists" (21). It is noteworthy that when Bailey uses the term Black women, she especially focuses on queer and trans women. She frequently pairs "Black women" with "Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant folks" to amplify visibility while challenging the often-presumed heteronormativity of the category "Black women."

One of the most significant achievements of Bailey's work lies in the precise language she uses to theorize the concept of misogynoir and its negative impacts on the physical, mental, and social well-being of Black women. Though "misogynoir" was originally created with reference to American media, its use now transcends borders and describes a global phenomenon (1). Coined by Bailey, "misogynoir describes the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization" (1). From biased policy formulations to problematic media depictions, misogynoir pervades everyday life. Bailey shows that throughout American history, Black women have been portrayed with negative stereotypes in mass media, exacerbating the daily violence and discrimination that they experience. Recent media portrayals of racial equality have disproportionately centered on Black men, thereby reducing the possible liberatory escape from heteronormativity for Black women (5). Therefore, Bailey suggests, it has been necessary and crucial for Black women and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant people to unite and resist against misogynoir, establishing their own spaces on social media.

Another pivotal contribution of this book is the introduction of the framework of digital alchemy. Digital alchemy is a praxis designed by "women of color, Black women, and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant people to transform

everyday digital media into valuable social justice media that recode the failed scripts that negatively impact their lives" (24). Shifting the focus away from the negative stereotypes inherent in digital culture—such as hypersexuality, proneness to anger, and obesity—digital alchemy centers on generating transformative strategies against misogynoir and expanding alternative visions of worldbuilding. Across the book, Bailey demonstrates how this approach proves instrumental in mitigating the harm arising from misogynoir while fostering trust and shared values within a newly formed community dedicated to self-preservation.

In Chapter 1, "Misogynoir Is a Drag," Bailey reveals the ubiquity of misogynoir within digital culture while explaining the necessity for misogynoir to be transformed. In this context, the term "drag" does not refer to the playful, exaggerated performance of gender but rather signifies the act of drawing or pulling away. To "drag" means forcefully and aggressively admonishing someone verbally, with the intention of publicly embarrassing and insulting them—often linked to misogynoir on digital platforms. Bailey makes the statement, "to say 'misogynoir is a drag' is to say that misogynoir is tiresome and vexing, annoying and trying" (35). In order to demonstrate what misogynoir in a white supremacist patriarchal culture looks like, Bailey first contextualizes and analyzes the Twitter hashtag #RuinABlackGirlsMonday, in which people tweeted images of white women's bodies with stereotypically Black physical features. Bailey investigates Black women's engagement with this hashtag in order to show how they managed to transform the toxic conversation into a neutralized space for their mental health. Next, Bailey examines the video "Shit Black Girls Say," a response to the video "Shit Girls Say." "Shit Girls Say" makes fun of the way girls talk, but in the process perpetuates existing stereotypes about Black women as loud, angry, overly sexual, cis straight, and self-loathing. However, "Shit Black Girls Say" is written by a Black queer woman, which reveals that Black women also participate in misogynoir by distancing themselves from and suppressing other Black women to appease the patriarchy. Later, Bailey examines YouTube comments regarding

violent police actions against Black girls to highlight their vulnerable situation as a result of long-standing, damaging stereotypes and the urgency for change.

The following chapter, “Transforming Misogynoir through Trans Advocacy,” focuses on transformative online activities centered around Black trans women and their endeavors to create a secure environment for themselves. This chapter begins with the introduction of trans advocate Janet Mock, who also created the hashtag #GirlsLikeUs for women to express themselves and gather. Bailey emphasizes the dynamic and real-time nature of social media engagement as a lifesaving and health-affirming praxis. Conducting two illustrative case studies of hashtags, namely #GirlsLikeUs and #FreeCeCe, across platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr, Bailey examines both the virtual and physical networks forged through these hashtags. These networks have heightened the visibility of Black trans women and expanded people’s understanding of health. Such networks reflect their agency in organizing and collaborating, not only with each other but also more broadly with wider LGBTQ organizations. For example, influenced by Support CeCe activism, Black community and LGBTQ youth workers protested against disproportionate police attention in 2012 (100). As Bailey notes, “visibility is a double-edged sword: As much as we want to celebrate the successes of trans women of color in the public sphere, that excitement is tempered with the deadly reality of trans women of color’s lives being cut short by violence” (102).

In Chapter 3, “Web Show Worldbuilding Mitigates Misogynoir,” Bailey analyses three web shows on YouTube, through which Black queer and trans creators redefine dominant representations of themselves. The three web shows—*Between Women*, *Skye’s the Limit*, and *195 Lewis*— constitute content crafted by and for marginalized Black queer individuals, offering “their own possibility models,” rather than catering to the “privileged out-group members” (104). These shows present many aspects of Black queer life that are not acknowledged in mainstream media, including gender roles, kink, queer sex, mental health, and relationships. According to Bailey, these shows, which cover both positive and

debatable topics, such as cheating and intimate partner violence, "provide a different way of doing family outside a normative frame" (143). For example, *195 Lewis* discusses polyamory and transforms the dynamics of cheating into complicated feelings that allow for multiple loves (136). Black queer creators explore and focus on the health, happiness, and relationships of Black queer women by describing the realities they aspire to, providing a misogynoir-free space for Black women to take care of their health and recover from trauma.

In the subsequent chapter, "Alchemists in Action against Misogynoir," Bailey focuses on the social media platform Tumblr and its Black queer users. Drawing on insightful interviews with two Black queer informants, Bailey points out that Tumblr was utilized to "educate a generation of users in social justice activism" (165) and was thought of as a "relatively safe digital space" for Black LGBTQ people to congregate (151), notably from 2009 to 2015 (147). Bailey again discusses the dual-edged nature of visibility, arguing that Tumblr operates as a force. It provides a space for marginalized people to find with each other and foster a collective repository of accomplishments, while simultaneously exacerbating the risk of external exploitation and targeting (170). Therefore, Bailey calls for creating new tools and new strategies to empower these digital communities to transform misogynoir and their relationship with it.

Moya Bailey's groundbreaking work constitutes an invaluable contribution to Black studies, queer studies, and media studies. Bailey contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender diversity and social justice, challenging the heteronormative framework in both mainstream and academic narratives. Through her profound insights and rigorous research, Bailey illuminates marginalized people and deepens readers' awareness of misogynoir and the transformative actions of digital alchemists. In addition, *Misogynoir Transformed* emphasizes the significant role of social media as a space of resistance and transformation, prompting a reclamation of digital spaces and enhancing the sense of community and agency among Black women. At the same time, Bailey emphasizes the double effect of

this greater visibility, keeping a discerning gaze on the unresolved issues and potential dilemmas that emerge as a result of visibility. Despite platforms like Tumblr and Twitter having been harnessed as transformative spaces, institutionalized misogynoir remains pervasive—perhaps even more so—within short video platforms, thereby disseminating its pernicious influence far beyond the confines of Black women's community. For readers who are unfamiliar with the digital alchemy crafted by Black women in America and those unintentionally immersed within an uncritical environment of misogynoir, this book serves as an illuminating entry point for reflection. It challenges readers to contemplate their own roles and avoid media practices that inadvertently perpetuate misogynoir. This is a central takeaway from Bailey's work, and it offers a path towards advancing social justice in the future.

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Yiming Wang is a PhD candidate in the Arts, Media and Culture Program at Maastricht University. She is working on the project "Fandom and Participatory Censorship: *Boys' Love* Fiction and Globalized Activities across the Great Firewall of China." She has coauthored with Jia Tan "Participatory Censorship and Digital Queer Fandom: The Commercialization of *Boys' Love* Culture in China" in the *International Journal of Communication*. She completed her MPhil degree in Gender Studies (affiliated with Cultural Studies) at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include fan studies, queerness and feminism, popular culture, and censorship studies.

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